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*The Abuse of Miraculous Powers in the  
Church of Corinth considered.*

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A  
SERMON

Preached before the  
UNIVERSITY of OXFORD,  
At CHRIST-CHURCH,

ON  
SUNDAY, Feb. 2. 1755.

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By RICH. HIND, D.D. late Student of  
*Christ-Church*, Rector of *Sbering* in *Essex*, and  
Chaplain to the *Lord Bishop of Norwich*.

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AT CHRIST CHURCH

ON  
Sunday, Feb. 2, 1885

BY RICHARD D. D. ... of  
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## I COR. XIV. 23.

*If therefore the whole Church be come together into one Place, and All speak with Tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?*

**A**MONG the Objections, which have been thought to affect the Evidence of Christianity, Unbelievers have sometimes urged the Abuse of miraculous Gifts, in the Apostolick Age of the Church. The History of Christianity, in later Periods, under the *ordinary* Influence of the Spirit, is such a Series of Corruptions and Divisions, as appears to Them, strange and unaccountable. But their Difficulties grow upon them, when they see the same Face of Things, in the *first* Ages of Christianity; when they read of it's Abuse, as coæval with it's Existence; when they observe the little Communities, into which the first Christians formed themselves, split into se-

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parate Factions and Parties, in the very Lifetime of the Apostles, under the *supernatural* Oeconomy and Ministration of the Spirit; and, above all, when they are told, that some of the first Converts to the Gospel, Persons actually endued with miraculous Gifts, exercised those Gifts in the most disorderly and tumultuous Manner. The Abuses of miraculous Powers, recorded in the New Testament, they know not how to reconcile with their being miraculous. It should seem to Them, that a God of Peace and Order should have made effectual Provision for a right Use of those Powers; or indeed, that a right Use of them must have followed, by a Sort of natural Consequence; — that it must, in short, have been one and the same Act of *one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every Man severally as he will*, to endue human Agents with supernatural Powers, and with a supernatural Impulse to a sober and discreet Application of them.

Now, as the Reverse of this appears to have been the Case, upon unquestionable Authority; it may not be amiss, to clear the Fact, as it stands upon Record, from the Consequences, which some Men would draw from it.

And, to do Justice to the Objection, let us take a short View of the Fact, as recorded in the New Testament; where we find the Assembly



bly of Christians at *Corinth* particularly concerned in the Charge; that Church being eminently distinguished by the Abundance of it's Spiritual Gifts, and by it's early Abuse and Misapplication of them. The principal of those miraculous Endowments, and the disorderly Exercise of them, are expressed, in the warm Expostulation, which follows the Text, v. 26. *How is it then, Brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a Psalm, hath a Doctrine, hath a Tongue, hath a Revelation, hath an Interpretation.* In their publick Assemblies, when it was usual for them to feel the Suggestions of the Spirit, either in having the Matter and Expressions of a divine Hymn impressed upon their Minds; or some Doctrine of Christianity immediately revealed to them; or, in an instantaneous Ability of speaking Languages which they had never learnt, or of interpreting them, when spoken by others — Every one was ready, with his *Psalm*, or his *Doctrine* — was impatient to be first heard by the Rest of the Assembly: and rather than not be heard, they spoke several of them at once, to the great Disorder and Confusion of the Church. And, as to the Gift of *Tongues* in particular, which was bestowed principally (if not solely) for the Conversion of Heathens, and *for a Sign, not to them that be-*

*lieve, but to them that believe not ;* This was employed, (just as we see the acquired Gift employed by some Christians at present) in making Prayers and Thanksgivings, in a Language not understood by the People.

In this Way, it must be owned, the proper Business of *Edification*, of *Exhortation*, and *Comfort*, could be very little promoted. But that was not all — for it is to be observed too, that these Abuses arose from a Viciousness of Temper and Disposition, which should seem inconsistent with a supernatural *Measure of the Spirit*. The inspired Converts were puffed up with Pride, and Conceit, and an Opinion of real Merit and Superiority, on account of their instrumental Endowments. They contended about the Precedency of their respective Gifts, despising their Christian Brethren, who were favoured with no Gifts at all ; or, with such only, as, in their Opinion, stood lower in the Rank of Excellence and Dignity. Amidst the Heat and Violence of these Contentions, this *Strife of Tongues*, it were to have been presumed, there could be no Room for the Evangelical Grace of *Charity*, if we had not St. Paul's own Authority for it. *Ye covet earnestly the best Gifts — ye contend about the comparative Excellence, and Value of your extraordinary Powers : and yet shew I unto*  
*you*

*you a more excellent Way; the Way of Charity, of mutual Affection and Good-will, which is far superior to the most glaring of your miraculous Gifts, to speaking with the Tongues of Men and of Angels.*

But, not to dwell upon a Fact, so notorious, as the ill Behaviour of the *Corinthian* Assembly — it may be just observed, that the Abuses above-mentioned, seem not to have been peculiar to *Them*; but that the same irregular Exercise of Spiritual Gifts had broke in upon the Order and Decency of the Christian Converts at *Rome*. For *St. Paul*, we find, saw Occasion to call on *Them*, not to think of themselves more highly, than they ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God had dealt to every Man the Measure of Faith: And — having Gifts, differing according to the Grace given to them, whether Prophecy, to prophecy according to the Proportion of Faith &c. — Or — if the Apostle meant not to correct Irregularities, but to prevent them; that implies however, that such Irregularities were to be apprehended and guarded against — implies perhaps, that miraculous Powers would be peculiarly apt, through human Weakness, to be misapplied and perverted.



Be that as it will — The disorderly Exercise of those Powers in the *Corinthian* Church, is a Fact out of Dispute. And from thence, the *Unbelievers* and *Unlearned* of the present Age, are ready to adopt the Language of the Text, and to represent the Case, supposed by the Apostle, and reprov'd by him, as being truly reproachful to an inspired Assembly, in a Light, which they imagine to reflect Discredit on the Gospel.

An Assembly, say they, of Christians, all or many of them divinely inspired, quarrelling with one another about the Rank and Precedency of their several Gifts; envying, or despising one another; speaking, several of them at a Time, in Languages unknown to their Audience; and so introducing the most irreverent Uproar and Confusion into a religious Assembly, instead of answering the Purposes of sober Instruction — gives Them an Idea of a Number of hot-headed Madmen or Enthusiasts, rather than of Persons *supernaturally* enlightened. Such an Account of Things comes clogged with Circumstances, that seem to Them to affect the Credit of the *Whole*. Such *Emulations*, and *Wrath*, and *Strife*, and *Envyings*, in their Judgement, comport not with extraordinary Infusions of that Spirit, whose genuine Fruit is said to be *Love*, *Peace*, *Gentleness*, *Meekness*, and *Temperance*. — Is there not, in short,

short, a necessary and indissoluble Connection between miraculous Gifts, and a sober and orderly Exertion of them? Or, if that should not be allowed, was not the Father of Lights concerned to *prevent* such irreverent and offensive Abuses, and by a farther Interposition to restrain and direct the endowed Persons in a right Use of their Gifts?

For a short Answer to the former of these Questions, let us have Recourse to Appearances that lie more level to our Observation; and judge of the Case before us, by a Comparison with what happens in Nature, and is the Object of our daily Experience. — If the Distinction of our own Ideas, when we contemplate the two governing Faculties of the Mind, did not enable us to apprehend a merely *accidental* Connection between great *acquired* Knowledge, and great Virtue and Rectitude of Temper; we should be convinced of the Thing, by what we see expressed and exemplified in real Characters in Life. We see, in daily instances, that Men may, from Diligence and Application, improve in *Wisdom*, without growing in *Grace*: We see, that Men *may be*, because they often actually *are*, as eminently distinguished by their vicious Habits, wrong Turns of Temper, and practical Indiscretions, as by the uncommon  
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Compass, and Extent of their Knowledge. But, if this happens every Day, in the Way of *naturally acquired* Improvement; why may not the same Thing, or something analogous to it, happen in a *supernatural* Way? Why should any Difference arise, in the two Cases, from the different Way and Manner, in which Knowledge is communicated to the Mind? Or, Why may not God reveal himself to the Understanding, and impart such Truths as lie beyond the Reach of Man's natural Faculties; or give an instantaneous Ability of speaking Languages before unknown; or of working any other supernatural Effect; and yet leave the *Will*, as he found it — entirely free and indifferent, either to co-operate with, or to abuse the *ordinary* Measures of his Grace? Or why, in short, should it be more extraordinary for a Man, by a *miraculous* Power, to *remove Mountains, and have no Charity*; than, from Nature and Exercise, to possess such a Measure of bodily Strength, as is brutal, both in the Degree, and the mischievous Application of it?

One great Reason for Mistake in a very obvious Matter, seems to be; the not sufficiently distinguishing between the miraculous *Gifts*, and the sanctifying *Graces* of the Spirit. And yet, no two Things, surely, are more evidently to be  
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distinguished. They *differ* from each other, in the Subject, which they respectively influence ; and in the principal Ends and Purposes, which they are meant respectively to accomplish. They *resemble* each other, only, as they are derived from the same divine Person ; and are concentrical Emanations, as it were, from the supreme Fountain of Understanding, and Power, and moral Rectitude, and every good and perfect Gift. For, the ordinary Graces of the Spirit are directed, more especially, to the *Will* : But the supernatural Gifts have for their Subject the *Understanding* which is enlightened ; or those other *Physical Powers* of the Man, which are, to Appearance, encreased beyond their natural Size and Proportion. In this latter Case, the Man (if he be indeed an Agent, and not rather a mere Instrument, or Sort of Medium, by which Omnipotence gives a sensible Instance of a Departure from, what we call, the fixed Laws of Nature) in the latter Case, I say, the Man is concerned, *principally* at least, as a *natural* Agent. But in the former, the Holy Spirit by insensible, but not therefore less real Impressions, acts upon him, under the more significant, and to himself more interesting Relation of a *moral*, accountable Being. And therefore, though the ordinary Gifts are ineffectual without human Co-operation ;

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ration; though they are not, in general, bestowed upon an habitually immoral Disposition, yet, where they act upon a proper Recipient, they will most certainly have their proper Effect, of refining and sanctifying the Heart; and will lead Men on in a progressive State of Improvement in Righteousness. So that one cannot any more conceive, how a Man should be a bad Man, whilst he acts under this Sort of spiritual Influence, than one can suppose it possible for him, to be at once possessed of two contradictory Characters.

But then, all this is foreign to the Case of supernatural Powers. Antecedently to all Information from Scripture, in a Matter so remote from Sense, as the invisible Agency of the divine Spirit; our Notions and Conjectures about the Manner and Circumstances of his miraculous Impressions, must have been wild and extravagant. *We* might have imagined, that the Impulse was irresistible, and the consequent Act instantaneous; if we had not been told, that *the Spirits of the Prophets were subject to the Prophets*: from whence we are led to conclude, that miraculous Powers (if permanently inherent) were exerted, and brought forth into Act, *to a certain Degree*, at the Discretion of the Person endued with them. The Mind, from reflecting  
upon

upon this Circumstance, which it could never have determined or ascertained of itself, is led on with less Difficulty to conceive, that supernatural Impressions might take place, without affecting the *moral State* of the Will; and that Men might be left to the natural Workings of their own Temper, whilst acting by a supernatural Power, that was directed to (what was in a moral Consideration) an entirely distinct Part of the human Composition.

In Aid of what hath been advanced, to shew the Distinction and Independence of the Spirit's moral Graces and extraordinary Gifts; one might illustrate that Distinction, from the different Ends and Purposes intended by each of them. — But this may be done with more Propriety, when we examine the Weight of the second Objection; For,

II. Granting, it was, in the Nature of Things, possible for Persons supernaturally endowed, to be imprudent, indiscreet, and tumultuous in the Exercise of their Gifts; yet, was it not to be expected, that God should have *prevented* such flagrant Abuses of the Spirit; and by a farther Interposition have restrained, and directed the endowed Persons in a right Use of their Gifts? Or — in other Words, if God did miraculously interpose at all, (as he did, on the



present Supposition) should he not have interposed in another Manner, and in a greater Degree? — The Objection thus stated, (and this is the fair and evident Sense of it) becomes very comprehensive; and hath in Fact been extended to almost every particular Circumstance in the Christian Scheme, by Men, who make their own narrow Notions and imperfect View of Things, a Rule for God's Wisdom; and their unreasonable Expectations, a Rule for his Goodness, in his providential Administrations. For in the same loose Way of objecting, may it not be said? — Hath it not been said in Fact? — It were to have been expected, that the Book, supposed to contain the revealed Will of God, should have been endited, and conveyed down to us, under other Circumstances, than at present belong to it? — That the Stile of it should have been more pure and elegant, more conformable to the received Rules of Art — Or, that it should have been secured from the Errors and Imperfections incident to other Books, handed down through successive Generations — from various Readings, and the Ambiguities, and dissonant Interpretations, consequent upon them — Or, that there should have been a standing, and infallible Guide, for the Explanation of Difficulties, and determining all Religious

gious Disputes — Or, that, instead of a standing Revelation, there should have been a particular one, to every Age, and to each Individual of every Age — Or, in a Word, that the standing Revelation, which hath been given upon the Christian Plan, should not have been published in so late a Period of the World, or be still kept concealed from so great a Part of it. In all these, and the like Cases, two Principles are assumed as true, which are Both of them manifestly false — viz. That whatever Measures would, *to our Apprehension*, have been more advantagious and favourable to Mankind, in their Religious Capacity, would have been *really* so: — and, in the next Place, that the most advantagious Measures were such, as the Divine Justice and Goodness were concerned to pursue.

Allowing then, that the miraculous Gifts of the primitive Converts *were* exercised, under some unfavourable Appearances; these are of no Weight, in the Way of Objection, against their Reality: nor would they have been of any material Weight, against the many Attestations to the Truth of the Gospel, though they had been still *more* unfavourable; though the Abuses had been more flagrant; or, though it should appear

pear, that the supernatural Gifts, so abused, had been *permanent*.

In farther Support of these Assertions, we may advance something positive, by recurring to the Distinction before made, between the Spirit's *ordinary* and *supernatural* Influence, and attending to the different Purposes designed by each of them.

Now, the End of the *ordinary* Influence is, *personal Sanctity*: But the End of the *extraordinary* was, merely, a *ministerial* and *instrumental Sufficiency*. An Ability to communicate to others, the in-felt Impressions of any Evangelical Doctrine; or to speak new Languages with the Fluency and Propriety, with which Men usually speak the Language of their Infancy; was all, that was meant to be conveyed to Persons, furnished with those respective Endowments. By these, they were sufficiently qualified to act as Messengers — to be the Instruments of conveying the glad Tydings of the Gospel, to all the Ends of the Earth. The Reality of the miraculous Gift depended not on the personal Qualities, or moral Endowments of the Messenger; or upon his uniform Discretion and Prudence in the Exercise of it: The Argument for Christianity, arising from the Miracle, had been the same, even though he had carried his  
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Indiscretion along with him, into the Country, to which he was sent, as a Messenger. But this doth not appear to have been the Case. — Much less can it be said, that there were any wilful Departures from the Instructions given, from the Terms of the Message to be conveyed; or that miraculous Gifts were employed in support of any false Doctrine. As to the main Point of all, we may assert upon St. Paul's Authority, that there was no Danger from any miraculous Pretensions. *"I give you to understand, says he, that no Man speaking by the Spirit of God, calleth Jesus accursed: and that no Man can say, that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. And, till Evidence be produced of the contrary, we are at Liberty to suppose, that, in comparatively lower Points, Providence did in fact superintend the Conduct of the Messengers, in their several Provinces; and recommended the general Evidences of the Gospel, by the Christian Spirit that shone forth in it's Instruments: though, every Instance of this Sort, it must be remembered, was a Proof, not of any necessary Union, but an occasional Concurrence of moral Graces, and supernatural Gifts.*

What hath been now suggested, receives some Countenance from Scripture; which gives us reason to conclude, that Spiritual Gifts were occasionally withdrawn from such, as continued to misapply and abuse them. *St. Paul* advises *Timothy*, not to neglect, but to stir up, to cherish, to rekindle *the Gift of God* (which seems to be explained in the following Verse by *the <sup>a</sup> Spirit of Power*) which was in him. And if the Expressions of, <sup>b</sup> *grieving* and <sup>c</sup> *quenching* the Spirit, may be understood in the Sense, which Commentators have usually affixed to them; may we not be allowed to urge it, as at least a probable Fact, that the *Degree*, and even the *Permanency* of the Spirit's supernatural, as well as of his ordinary Influence, was made to depend upon the diligent and rational Exercise of it; or, upon the Temper and Behaviour of the Persons, under that Influence? And if that were the Case, the Force of the Objection now in View, if it had any, is much weakened, if not entirely removed. This, however, is certain, that it cannot be proved, *not* to have been the Case; and consequently, that Men have no Right to make the Objection.

a 2 Tim. 1. 7.

b Eph. 4. 30.

c 1 Thess. 5. 19.

But,

But, granting, after all, what cannot be proved — I will add, that we are under no Necessity of guarding against the supposed Weight of the Objection, by a mere Appeal to our Ignorance; but that many good Purposes, obvious to our confined View of Things, might be served, by *occasionally* making use of *weak*, or even of *wicked* Men, as Instruments of supernatural Agency.

It is usual with the Advocates for Christianity, to draw a conclusive Argument, in it's Favour, from the natural Insufficiency of the first Preachers of the Gospel, to the great Purposes accomplished by them. And is not the Argument improved and strengthened by the Case before us? Had Christianity indeed been a concerted Plan of human Policy, Care might have been taken, to have employed none but Men of approved Discretion, and civil Prudence in the first Publication of it. But a Being of infinite Power and Wisdom saw fit to proceed by other Measures. He took the first Publishers of his revealed Will, indiscriminately, out of the common Bulk of Mankind: and might leave them to be influenced by their several Propensities, and Turns of Temper, that he might, in a more conspicuous Manner, *make his Strength perfect*

a 2 Cor. 12. 20.

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in



*in Weakness.* Might he not take this Method of <sup>a</sup> *ordaining Strength out of Babes and Sucklings,* for this very Purpose, *that he might still the Enemy,* and *convince the Gainsayer* that this great Work was not of Man, but of God?

This Sort of Reasoning might perhaps have been applied with Advantage, though the Misbehaviour complained of, had been more notorious, or more *general*, than it appears to have been. For there is no Ground for supposing, that the Abuse of the Spirit was General. One may rather presume, that it was more common, for the endowed Persons, to preserve a right Frame of Mind; and to behave, in all Respects, as became them: and that the excepted Cases, were of those, who deviated from a Sobriety and Rectitude of Conduct. And if this be allowed, it is conceivable, that much good Use might be made of those Examples of Deviation. The more sober and discreet would be confirmed in a right Use of their Powers — They would see, in the Instances of their Abuse, that supernatural Gifts were merely *Instrumental*, and derived no personal Merit on those, who were possessed of them: and a Conviction of this Sort, conveyed in so forcible and striking a

<sup>a</sup> Psal. 8. 2.

Manner, as that of obvious Fact and Example, would act upon them, as a powerful Guard against the popular Weakness of over-rating their Gifts, or Themselves for the Sake of their Gifts. They would see, that (whether supernatural Endowments were forfeitable or not, upon a Misapplication of them) the moral and more valuable Graces of the Spirit were, however, equally forfeitable by Persons favoured with miraculous Powers, and by the whole Body of Christians; and that a Neglect to cultivate those internal and personal Qualities, would render them worthy of double Punishment, in that Day, when Many shall say in vain — *“ Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy Name? and in thy Name have cast out Devils? and in thy Name done many wonderful Works? and the Lord shall profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from me, ye that worked Iniquity.*

There is no saying, how much Good might arise, upon the whole, from the natural Tendencies, Reflections of this Sort would have, to produce confirmed Habits of a more exemplary Conduct, in the sober Part of the inspired Converts; or, whether their additional Holiness of Life, and Prudence of Deportment might not

<sup>a</sup> Matth. 7. 22.

overballance the Injuries, which Christianity may be supposed to have sustained from *some* Examples of a contrary Character.

And, may we not add, that if a Deprivation of Spiritual Powers *was* indeed consequent upon an improper Exercise of them ; this would be a further Lesson of Care and Circumspection to others — would serve to remind them, that *their Treasure* was, in like manner, deposited in *earthly Vessels*, and that without Perseverance in a right Use of their Gifts, They too might *quench the Spirit* that was in them ?

I will just observe, that the practical Application of the Fact, we have been considering, is not confined to Persons supernaturally endowed, in the first Ages of the Gospel ; but may be extended, with some Circumstances of Advantage, to the whole collective Body of Christians, in every succeeding Age of the Church. An Abuse of eminent Talents, whatsoever they may be, is peculiarly calculated to put Men of a lower Class upon their Guard. In this View, such Instances of human Infirmary, as the History before us presents us with, do more immediately perhaps, answer a good moral End, than a Conduct better suited to the Measure of Men's Endowments. Exemplary Goodness, and Rectitude of Conduct, might to a Degree, have failed of their Influence,



Influence, from such Men's supposed greater Aids and Assistances to an unspotted Righteousness. But their Miscarriages strike, and instruct very forcibly. *All these Things happened unto them for Ensamples, and were written for the Admonition* of succeeding Generations — for the Admonition of Those more especially, whose ample Supply of all the Means of intellectual Improvement are, in the present State of Things, equivalent to, and supersede all immediate Illuminations. It concerns all such in a particular Manner, *not to be highminded, but fear*; — as a Guard against the Tendencies of human Knowledge, which is sometimes seen to *puff up*, and *exalt above Measure*; to remember, that Men have brought a Reproach upon themselves; and (which is far worse) upon their Religion too, by an Abuse of superior Advantages: which were, doubtless, a *moral Motive* of the highest Kind; though not a *physical* or *necessary* Principle of an irreproachable Conduct.

I cannot dismiss this Subject, without adding one Reflection, too obvious to need being insisted on. And that is, that whatever hath been advanced, to clear the Misconduct of inspired Persons in the Primitive Church from it's supposed Consequences, is applicable to certain illustrious Characters in the Old Testament, and  
equally

equally obviates the Offence that has been taken at some Parts of their History. Inspiration (whenever given, under the Old Testament, or the New) was given, not for the Sake of the inspired, but for the Advantage of others, to whom the Persons, so favoured, were to be the Instruments of making known the Counsels of Providence. But, supernatural Illuminations, we have seen, have no necessary Alliance, or indissoluble Bond of Connection with moral Righteousness: And, there are some good Reasons, that lie within the Reach of our limited Faculties; and, probably, many more that are concealed from us, why God might *not* see fit, to *raise* the enlightened to an absolute Exemption from human Frailties. Such a Privilege would have been of no Advantage to the Prophet, *as such* — the Advantage arising from it to the World, would have been *collateral* only, and *accidental*; it might therefore be withheld from them, without any Diminution, or Impeachment of their Prophetical Character.

I shall conclude with a Reflection or two, suggested by the Case, we have been considering, which would of themselves serve as an Answer to *real* Difficulties.

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Now, it hath often been well remarked, and should ever be attended to, that Christianity, considered as a Fact, that is supported by Evidence, cannot be shaken in it's Credit by any other Arguments, than what shall shew it, to maintain contradictory Doctrines; or to teach, as a moral Duty, any Thing wicked or immoral. These indeed, are internal *Impossibilities*, which must for ever stand in the Way, against the *Reality*, and, by Consequence, against the *Evidence* of any System of supposed divine Authority. For that which cannot *be*, cannot be *proved*. But, as unanswerable Difficulties in speculative Points, are of no Weight against *Demonstration*; so little Improbabilities are of no Weight, in so practical a Subject as Religion, against *moral Evidence*: And, though they should not disappear and vanish upon a closer Examination, are, all of them, sufficiently answered by an Appeal to our incompetent Judgements.

The better to compose and fortify the Mind against Difficulties in the extraordinary Administrations of Providence, we should attend to what is every Day passing before our Eyes. For it must be owned, after all, that Experience is the most instructive Guide to Man; the safest and most satisfactory, practical Principle; and  
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best suited to the contracted Measure of Man's Life and Faculties, in every View — in his civil, and in his religious Capacity. Now, in that small Part of the Plan of Providence, which lies before us, we see the natural Course of Things carried on, by Ways and Methods; and Ends accomplished by Instruments, to our Apprehension, the most improbable, and unlikely, and inadequate to the Purposes to be served by them. Infomuch that, antecedently to Fact and Experience, we perhaps should have supposed the Affairs of the World to have been conducted, by any other Laws, and by any other Instruments almost, than those we find to take Place. But then, these unexpected Appearances give us no Manner of Concern. We never look upon the settled Course of Things in the natural World, to be *less* real, or *less* right; because, prior to all Experience, we might possibly have formed to ourselves a Scheme of Things, different in many Particulars, from that which is found to obtain: But, we acquiesce in Nature's Laws and Establishments, and regulate our Conduct by them. Apply this to the Case of Religion, both natural and revealed, (for there are no Difficulties in the one, which, if they signified any Thing, would not bear equally hard upon the other) and it will furnish an Answer to most of the  
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Objections; with which Men perplex themselves and the World. It will no longer be an alarming Difficulty, that God should have pursued the same Plan in the moral World, which we see to have been pursued in the natural: or, that he should have introduced his Gospel into the World, by Methods seemingly the most inadequate, or by the Instrumentality of weak and indiscreet, or even of wicked Men, seemingly the most improper *for*, as well as the most unworthy of the Employment.

Of these and the like Appearances, it may be farther remarked, that they are manifestly analogous to (what may be called) the *general* Conduct of the supreme Governor, in his extraordinary Dispensations. In which He seems to have interposed, in such Manner and Degree only, as was necessary to the Ends, He meant to accomplish; and to have permitted (as far as might be) the stated Laws of his Government, and the Consequences of Men's natural Liberty, to have their usual Course.

But, let the Circumstances, under which He dispensed supernatural Powers, be what they will —— be they more or less accountable to human Wisdom; This however is certain, that, the Abuse of them, accompanied, as it was, with an apostolical Reproof, is to us a conclusive Ar-

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best suited to the contracted Measure of Man's Life and Faculties, in every View — in his civil, and in his religious Capacity. Now, in that small Part of the Plan of Providence, which lies before us, we see the natural Course of Things carried on, by Ways and Methods; and Ends accomplished by Instruments, to our Apprehension, the most improbable, and unlikely, and inadequate to the Purposes to be served by them. Inasmuch that, antecedently to Fact and Experience, we perhaps should have supposed the Affairs of the World to have been conducted, by any other Laws, and by any other Instruments almost, than those we find to take Place. But then, these unexpected Appearances give us no Manner of Concern. We never look upon the settled Course of Things in the natural World, to be *less* real, or *less* right; because, prior to all Experience, we might possibly have formed to ourselves a Scheme of Things, different in many Particulars, from that which is found to obtain: But, we acquiesce in Nature's Laws and Establishments, and regulate our Conduct by them. Apply this to the Case of Religion, both natural and revealed, (for there are no Difficulties in the one, which, if they signified any Thing, would not bear equally hard upon the other) and it will furnish an Answer to most of the  
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Objections; with which Men perplex themselves and the World. It will no longer be an alarming Difficulty, that God should have pursued the same Plan in the moral World, which we see to have been pursued in the natural : or, that he should have introduced his Gospel into the World, by Methods seemingly the most inadequate, or by the Instrumentality of weak and indiscreet, or even of wicked Men, seemingly the most improper *for*, as well as the most unworthy of the Employment.

Of these and the like Appearances, it may be farther remarked, that they are manifestly analogous to (what may be called) the *general* Conduct of the supreme Governor, in his extraordinary Dispensations. In which He seems to have interposed, in such Manner and Degree only, as was necessary to the Ends, He meant to accomplish ; and to have permitted (as far as might be) the stated Laws of his Government, and the Consequences of Men's natural Liberty, to have their usual Course.

But, let the Circumstances, under which He dispensed supernatural Powers, be what they will — be they more or less accountable to human Wisdom ; This however is certain, that, the Abuse of them, accompanied, as it was, with an apostolical Reproof, is to us a conclusive Ar-

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gument,

gument, that such Powers were really dispensed; and 'tis certain too, that Christianity was, in consequence, really propagated. And that is all, that we are concerned in. As to the Rest, the foregoing Reflections should operate with great Advantage: For, *if Man knoweth not what is before him, how shall he search out the more hidden Counsels of the Lord?* The Time will come indeed, when, all our Difficulties will be cleared up; and every seeming Irregularity will be adjusted: when *we shall see face to face, and, comparatively to our present Imperfections, shall know, even as we are known.* In the mean while, the Advice of the royal Preacher, relative to the Manner of paying divine Worship, may serve as a Rule to us in speaking and judging of God's external Revelations — *Be not rash with thy Mouth, and let not thy Heart be hasty, to utter any Thing before God: for he is in Heaven, and thou upon Earth; therefore let thy Words be few,*

a Eccl. 5. 2.

F I N I S.

